

Researchers Estimate Medical Costs of Obesity in Kansas

By KDHE News staff

In a recently published paper, researchers at RTI International and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided the first state-by-state estimates of obesity-attributable medical expenditures.

The paper also provides rough estimates of the cost of burden that falls on taxpayers in each state, through Medicaid and Medicare. Published in the journal *Obesity Research*, the paper estimates that national medical expenditures resulting from obesity (excluding overweight) are \$75 billion in 2003 dollars. State-level estimates range from \$87 million (Wyoming) to \$7.7 billion (California).

The released research, entitled “State-Level Estimates of Annual Medical Expenditures Attributable to Obesity”, by Eric A. Finkelstein and Ian C. Fiebelkorn, RTI International, and Guijing Wang, CDC, appeared in the January 2004 edition of the journal *Obesity Research*, published by the American Association for the Study of Obesity.

Obesity-related medical expenditures in Kansas total \$657 million, with \$138 million of this total being financed by Medicare and \$143 million of it financed by Medicaid. These obesity-related expenditures represent approximately 5.5 percent of the state’s annual health care bill.

“The estimates of obesity-attributable medical expenditures present the newest available information concerning the economic impact of obesity at the state level,” the authors noted. “Policy makers should consider these estimates, along with other factors, in determining how best to allocate scarce public health resources.”

In Kansas, more than 1 in 5 adults are obese and almost 3 in 5 adults are overweight. This growing epidemic has captured the attention of Kansas’ lawmakers. Dr. William Dietz, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity Director with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) addressed the issue recently in Topeka during a joint session of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee and House Health and Human Services Committee. Dr. Dietz’s presentation was entitled *Epidemic of Obesity: A Model for the Challenges of Chronic Disease Prevention and Control*.

Since 1992, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) has monitored the prevalence of obesity among the Kansas adult population. KDHE recently acquired grant funding from the Sunflower Foundation to begin monitoring the prevalence of overweight Kansas children. KDHE also facilitates state and community level planning initiatives to address the growing burden of obesity. These partnerships promote increased physical activity and improved eating habits among Kansas’ adults and youths in community settings and schools.

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The authors of the research caution that because the state-level estimates are associated with large standard errors, the estimates should not be used to make cost comparisons across states or between payers within states.

Copies of the paper are available from the journal's Web site:

<http://www.obesityresearch.org> or copies of the full report may be requested by e-mail to listen@rti.org.